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EXTRAORDINARY CASE

311
OF

S U I C I D E :

James Doe
BEING

R A NARRATIVE

OF THE

LIFE AND UNFORTUNATE END

OF

James Doe,

Who was found Drowned in Seamill-Dock, near Bristol,

WITH AN EXACT

COPY OF THE MANUSCRIPT,

Found written on the Walls of an uninhabited House,

AT SEA-MILL DOCK,

On SATURDAY the 14th of October, 1797.

B R I S T O L :

Printed by W. MATTHEWS, No. 62, Broad-Mead.

PRICE TWO-PENCE,

As it has been particularly requested by many respectable Persons of this City and Environs, that the Life of JAMES DOE should be published; —the Public are here presented with all the Information that can be obtained, concerning this unfortunate Man; copied from the Monthly Magazine, for October, 1797, and Supplementary Number for the same Year.



LIFE, &c. of JAMES DOE.

Extract from the Monthly Magazine for October, 1797.

To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine.

SIR,

AS your useful and entertaining Miscellany maintains a very extensive circulation throughout every County in the Kingdom, I am induced, from this consideration, to transmit you the particular description of a person unknown, found suffocated and drowned in Seamill-Dock, about 2½ miles from the City of Bristol, within the Tything of Stoke Bishop, and Parish of Westbury-upon-Trim, which may probably meet the the eye of some relative or acquaintance of the deceased.

Early in the morning of Friday, the 29th of September last, information was sent me by two Gentlemen, that in their walk along the banks of the River, leading from the Hotwells to Seamill-dock, they were desirous of taking a survey of the old ruins of the Dock (formerly a place in repute) when casting their eyes over the Wall, in an obscure corner, they saw the Body of a Man above the surface of the water, then flowing out, requesting the attendance of the parish officers to take charge of it. I immediately sent for the overseer of the poor, and, with my servant, attended him to the spot where the Man was found. In the mean time the Gentlemen had hailed a boat going down the river, it being then about half tide out, and prevailed on them to row into the dock, to make the body fast to an old ladder, that still remains against the wall, under the ruins of a crane; and in this state I found him. The tide had now flowed out below the body, and afforded me an opportunity of taking a particular survey of him. The attitude in which he lay drew my attention: his left leg was sunk in the mud up to his knee, his right leg was but little im-

mersed; his body bent forward in a stooping posture & arms extended as far as he could reach, as if in the act of saving himself from farther immersion in the mud. It appeared evident to me, that no accidental fall could possibly leave a man in that singular posture; and I suspected that he had purposely jumped off the dock wall, about 20 feet high from the mud, at ebb or fall of the tide, when the water was shallow over the mud. With some difficulty the body was got out, and on the following day an inquest was taken: the jury returned a verdict,—“Found drowned and suffocated, but by what means no evidence appeared before them.” The person was well dressed, but nothing found in his pockets, except a small miniature portrait of a lady, carefully wrapped up in paper, and tied round with silk; it was drawn in water colours on a piece of ivory, about an inch and a half long; now in my possession. The colours are effaced by the sea water, but the image is visible.—The following description of his person I got inserted in all the Bristol Papers:

“Saturday last the 30th September, Mr. Joyner, one of the Coroners of the County of Gloucester, took an inquest on the body of a person unknown, found the day before suffocated and drowned in Seamill Dock, within the parish of Westbury-upon-Trim and County of Gloucester: he appeared to be about five feet four inches high, short hair, over which he wore a wig; stout and well made: had on an exceeding good light drab cloth coat; light cotton waistcoat, bound round the pockets with blue silk riband; light velveteen breeches, with white metal buttons; a linen shirt frilled at the bosom; brown ribbed worsted stockings, apparently new; and a pair of new pumps, with ties. He appeared to be about 30 years of age, and to have been drowned two or three weeks.”

The foregoing description brought forward two women, who called twice at a public house, about a quarter of a mile distant from the spot where the body was found. They said that the description answered to a person that did lodge in their neighbourhood in Bristol; that he was

a stranger in the city, and lately come from London. That, supposing him to be the person drowned, they had searched his lodgings, and there found a red leather pocket-book, in which was written the name *Daw* or *Dor*, together with the address of a person of the same name in London, to whom they had written on the subject. The women omitting telling the name of the street of their residence, has hitherto prevented me from finding them out.

On Saturday the 14th instant, a gentleman that formerly lived at Seamills, when the dock was in its prosperity, visited the ruins of the warehouses and tenements adjoining, one of which tenements has its rooms perfect and entire. In the attic story he perceived much writing on the wall, which proves to be the diary of this extraordinary stranger, found drowned. As soon as the report reached me, I visited the the tenement, and copied from the wall the following diary, well written with a black-lead pencil, and nearly in the following order of time.

“ However singularly it may appear, I could not but take notice, upon entering this uninhabited tenement, of a small piece of an old newspaper, which had contained an account of the unfortunate catastrophe which happened at Brown Hill, near Burdlem, in Staffordshire, between Mr. Oliver, the Apothecary, and Mr. Wood, for which the former suffered at Stafford, this day fortnight ; it struck me with sympathetic horror, having lived in that county many years. It brought many of my imprudences to recollection, for which I sincerely repent.

“Sept. 11, 1797.

“ We are not our own keepers ; but were we to follow GOD’s word, and live to him, it would afford us comfort here, and heaven hererfter.

“ Sept. 11, 1797.

“ Avoid drunkenness, for it produces poverty.

“ Never be ungrateful to GOD or man. “ Sept. 11.

“ If my K—s—m acquaintance had become my friend, he might have saved me from an untimely death : when he was in prison, I was his friend at the hazard of my bread :

but I forgive him, and am well assured, that what he enjoys is by his merit and industry. Long may he and his partner in affection live to enjoy the fruits of his labour.—“Sept. 11.

“ I should not rebuke, because my imprudences in some measure has brought me to poverty ; but surely it is good to strain a point to risque even an imprudent man from the calamities of folly : how often does sympathy soften one’s sorrow, and with the aid of a little pecuniary assistance, restore an unfortunate being to industry and repentance.

“ Sept. 11th.

“ Be good betimes, for evil is the grand curse of mankind.

Sept. 11, 1797.

“ To be good is to be happy. “ V. one of the poets.

“ Never give way to despair, for fear of suicide, which must be displeasing to God and therefore hazardous to the soul.

“ Sept. 11, 1797.

“ The God of all mercy forgive my past offences ; and if there is pardon for suicide, may the intercession and blood of the Lamb procure that pardon for me, the chief of sinners.

“ Sept. 11, 1797.

“ O HORROR ! HORROR ! to rush into the presence of a justly offended God, with a load of guilt and iniquity ; but God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

“ If these few thoughts should be observed before my body is found, they may instruct the gentlemen of the jury to bring in their verdict *Felo-de-se*, for to deter others, as well, as in strict compliance with the law.—It is nothing but distress compels me to this rash act. “ Sept. 11, 1797,

O, my GOD, I have sinned against thee, and against light ; receive my soul, for Jesus Christ’s sake, or I am lost for ever.

“ Sept. 11, 1797.

“ There is no rest for the wicked with my GOD.

“ Faith in Christ.—Forgive your enemies. “ Sept. 11.

“ May those I have any ways wronged forgive me ; I die in peace with all mankind, and lament that I have not lived a better life. I die a miserable death ; the Lord have mercy upon my soul.

“ Sept. 11, 1797.

“ Never oppress the poor.—Do as you would be done to.

"Whosoever belongs to these premises, will forgive the scribbler his trespass; he impatiently waits the rising of the tide, to put an end to his earthly misfortunes.

"Five o'clock, evening, Sept. 11, 1797.

"I made my bed upon the floor, with the straw for my pillow; the tempestuousness of the night, with some inclination to sleep, has prolonged my life at least another tide.

"Tuesday morning, Sept. 12, 1797.

"O, Heavenly Father, be pleased to have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner, who turns to thee weeping, fasting, and praying; and, O Lord Jesus Christ, grant my repentance, however late, however imperfect, may not be in vain.

"Sept. 12, 1797.

"O GOD, give peace to all nations, and stop the calamities of war.

"Sept. 12, 1797.

"Forgive all errors—Had I followed such things, it would have saved me from this unfortunate end. Sept. 12.

"GOD be merciful to me a sinner.

"My Lord Mountmorres, with an ample fortune, put an end to his existence: he did it with all the conveniences of this life around him, and with a dying declaration that the Almighty would forgive him an act compelled by oppressors; hinting that some person had used him ill, which wounded his feelings to such a degree that life became a burden to him, notwithstanding his learning and high rank in life.

"I, poor soul, loaded with guilt, conscious of an ill-spent life, distressed in every point that this life can afford (without throwing the least reflection on his Lordship) dare not presume positively to join with with his Lordship in that sentiment, but, with trembling fear, must wait the awful issue at God's tremendous bar.

"God forbid I should cast any reflections on his Lordship, or his misfortunes.

"The following is a copy of a note found upon Lord Mountmorres's table, in the room he shot himself:

"A wicked and unjust conspiracy has been formed against

" my honour, my fortune, and my life ; the Almighty will for-
" give an act impelled by oppression."

" I sincerely hope his Lordship found it so.

" To wound another man's peace of mind, is an un-
charitable act.

" Indeed I find myself invested with a strong desire of
life, and dreadful fear of approaching God's bar, with my
accumulated guilt ; and I steadfastly believe, that the true
way to be saved, is by Jesus Christ, who died to save sin-
ners, of whom I am the chief. God grant I may become
an object of his mercy.

" I decline giving my name or profession ; my friends
may surmise that some ill fate has befallen me : if any of
them, by any chance, should hear of my fate it is not prob-
able they will ever see these thoughts. I hope to God
they will forgive me every injury I have done them.

" Jesus Christ deign to be the advocate with God the
Father for the redemption of my soul.

" The time is nearly arrived.—may Jesus pilot my dis-
tressed soul to his heavenly Kingdom. Amen

" Another tide gone.—Sept. 12, 1797.

" It must be my fate—I have no other relief.

" Conscious of guilt, dread fear alarms,
And Horror fills my soul,
Damnation claims me for her own,
My sins they are so foul.

Grant me, O Lord, thy grace divine,
And fervency in prayer ;

Pray take me out of Satan's power,
Unto thy gracious care.—Sept. 12."

*The following was scratched upon the wall with the point
of a nail.*

" Wednesday 13th Sept. I have been here 2 days and
2 nights, fasting and praying—This I hope will finish it."

The following was again written with a Black-lead Pencil.

" Thursday, September 14th, 1797; the last day I hope.

" My Lead is exhausted.

" I did not know, till surprized by the little girl coming into this distressed apartment, whom these premises belonged to. But Lord de Clifford will forgive me."

At the bottom of the stair case is written, on the wall.

" Redeem my soul from the water."

In a lower room of another Tenement, the following was written.

" O Lord, how weary I am of life! If my acquaintance should happen to see the writing, he will remember, perhaps, the hand of an old former acquaintance."

Thus ends the diary of this extraordinary stranger. The uninhabited tenement is about ten or twelve yards distant from the spot where he launched himself off, and is the property of Lord de Clifford.

It is very evident that this stranger received a very liberal education, or he possessed an uncommon strong mind. It is conjectured by some, that he was insane, but, when I consider how well finished most of his sentences and periods are, and that many of them were written from the impulse of the moment, I behold him as a man in full possession of his intellectual faculties, and with a collected mind, calmly resigned to his fate. He came there on the 11th, with a determined resolution of drowning himself at the evening tide, consequently all that he wrote on the 12th, could not have been premeditated, but were the thoughts of the moment, that arose in his mind on the prolonging of his existence. He certainly possessed a noble and generous mind; for where he mentioned his acquaintance as he thought harshly, a sentence immediately follows to soften the rebuke.

I remain, sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOSEPH JAMES.

Stoke Bishop, near Bristol,

O^r. 23, 1797.

Extract from the Supplementary Number of the Monthly
Magazine, for 1797.

To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine.

SIR,

THE extraordinary and affecting manuscript writing of the unfortunate stranger found drowned, in Seamill Dock, which I transmitted to you last month, having very probably excited the attention and sympathy of many of your numerous readers; I feel it a duty incumbent upon me to lay before them (through the channel of your useful publication) some information which I have since been enabled to procure of this unhappy and extraordinary person.

A few days previous to the publication of your Magazine, I caused a paragraph to be again inserted in the Bristol newspapers, requesting the attention of the readers to the personal description of the stranger found drowned at Seamill Dock, and inviting the two women, who had made enquiries after a stranger that was missing, and answering the same description, to come forward with their information, as the only probable means left of tracing out the name and connections of this unfortunate stranger. I was soon after waited on by two gentlemen, of Bristol, of the name of Ring, whose information and description of a person lately come to Bristol, and who worked at the Bristol Earthen-ware Manufactory, in the art of Painting, so exactly corresponded with the clothing and person of the man found drowned at Seamills, that there remained not a doubt of his being the person, the subject of their enquiry. Through their polite assistance, I obtained the name of the deceased, which is *James Doe*, and I also got an interview with the K—f—m acquaintance, who having visited the tenement, and viewed the manuscript writing there upon walls, recognized the hand-writing of his friend; he gave me likewise a description of his person and dress, which corresponded with that already published. For particulars of the deceased's family and friends, I was referred to

Several persons in London, one of whom, a respectable proprietor of a pottery there, writes thus :

“ SIR,

“ I received your's, and was affected at its contents. I should have written sooner, but I wished first to see his uncle, who has informed me of the following particulars :

“ James Doe was born at Lambeth, in Surrey of very respectable parents, and was educated in the same place. He served an apprenticeship, at Lambeth to a Painter in the China and Earthen-ware line. He was esteemed a good workman, and to my own knowledge, he worked some years at Mr. Wedgwood's manufactory, in Staffordshire. he was there very much respected by his employer, his fellow workmen, and all who knew him. He was fond of company, but I do not remember him to neglect business when urgent. Having a tolerable good education, he was fond of reading. He was particularly generous, and always first to relieve any of the trade out of employ, or in sickness. He worked at Mr. Braddely's, in Staffordshire, for six or seven years, and was, at that place, very much respected. In fact, I believe him to be generally beloved and respected wheresoever he worked. About three years ago he came to London, and finding little or no employment in the line in which he was brought up, he was obliged to leave town, and, being assisted by his friends, he embarked on board a ship for Newcastle, and from thence went on to Glasgow, in Scotland, where he was a fellow workman with one of my present Journeymen, and supported an excellent character there. From this time, I believe, he met with many disappointments. He then went to Ireland, and after stopping there a short time, he embarked on board a vessel bound for Swansea, in South Wales, where he worked some time, and then went on to the Worcestershire China Manufactory, which was, I believe the last place he worked at.”

Another of the deceased's friends writes as follows :

" SIR,

" Your's I received, and am sorry to hear of the melancholy fate of James Doe. I have known him and his relations for several years. He has an uncle, a brother, and two sisters living. His acquaintance with the person he mentions in his writings upon the wall, has been, I believe, of eighteen or twenty years standing. He was always forward in performing acts of friendship to his fellow workmen, and was a truly good man to his neighbours. I have conversed with a particular friend and acquaintance of the deceased, who is acquainted with every circumstance and the whole course of life of this extraordinary man; and he is collecting every information he can, which he will send you, in a letter, in a few days,

" I am your's, &c."

The following is an extract from the Letter alluded to.

" SIR,

" *London, Nov. 20, 1797.*

" You seem to be very anxious concerning the life of the unfortunate stranger found drowned in Seamill Dock. You have a right to know it, for the kindness you have shown to his unfortunate remains.—James Doe was born at Lambeth, about two miles from London, of honest parents, who brought him up in as creditable a manner as their circumstances would admit. At the age of fourteen years, or thereabouts, he was put as an apprentice to Mr. Griffiths, at the delft pottery, High-street, Lambeth. When he was out of his time, he continued working at his business till it became slack, and the queen's ware meeting with great encouragement, he went into Staffordshire for employment, where he remained upwards of twenty years, working for different masters, and then came up to London, in want of employ, and got work at China-gilding for a few months. He was then invited into Staffordshire again, where he remained but a short time; and from that time he has been considered as the wanderer of the trade. He was the most charitable man I ever knew; and he was often known to

neglect himself when misfortunes came on his friends and acquaintances, to whose relief he contributed both time and money, as much as lay in his power. Believe me, sir, you have bestowed your trouble on the remains of a very good-hearted man.—The acquaintance he alluded to in his diary, and another person, were going to France, about thirteen years ago, with a view of carrying over and establishing there the Queen's-ware manufactory; some of the master potters heard of it, and had them confined in prison: as James Doe heard of it, he went through the trade to gather money to support his friend, and to preserve him from want; and he, poor soul, contributed all he had, for that purpose. To be denied assistance by that man whom he had relieved in distress, was too great for his tender heart to bear. Sir, I do not pretend to hold my friend up to perfection, the last action of his life is against him; but I believe, the denial of relief by that man whom he had served and relieved in distress, was the sole cause of his committing the rash act of suicide. The language of the manuscript writing is nearly the same as his last conversation with me, as far as this friend is mentioned. I perfectly agree with you, that he was in his senses as much as he ever was in his life, when he committed the act of suicide. He was acquainted with a Mr. Greenwood, in Staffordshire, for some years, a man remarkable for fine knowledge; to that man the unfortunate Doe owed a great deal of his knowledge; and although Mr. Greenwood was a very sensible man, yet he held it just for a man to destroy himself; and, like my friend, in his perfect senses, actually made away with himself the day before he was to have been married to a person of credit and property. They are two of the strangest suicides I ever heard; and had James Doe written to his friends in London, he would have had money sent him; for his friends in London would have thought it a happiness to relieve him. He was a very useful man in the Staffordshire ware manufactory, as he had studied the chemical secrets of that business. He was fond of reading. I shall be happy in communicating any farther particulars

you may require ; and am, sir,

" Your's," &c. &c.

To the information contained in the foregoing letters, I beg leave to add, that I have lately conversed with several persons that knew the deceased in Dublin, in Staffordshire, at Worcester, in Swansea, and near Exeter ; they all unite in one general opinion: viz. that he was universally beloved by all ranks of his fellow workmen, that he possessed a charitable and humane heart, and was ever ready in assisting his fellow creatures in distress. He came to Bristol early in August, and immediately visited his friend mentioned in his writings. I have traced him to his friend's house, where he spent three or four days and nights immediately before drowning himself. From a very particular and circumstantial enquiry into the conduct and deportment of the deceased, even to the very morning of Sept. 11, I do not find there was any the least mark of insanity about him ; neither was he involved in debt, excepting ten or twelve Shillings at his lodgings. It may then be asked, what motives could induce this person to destroy himself? enjoying full health, and possessing an art by which he could obtain a competent and perhaps genteel livelihood, he had the means of providing for himself, and rising superior to want. We must therefore let him speak for himself. He says, " If my K—— acquaintance had become my friend, he might have saved me from an untimely death." And again, "How often does sympathy soften one's sorrow, and with the aid of a little pecuniary assistance, restore an unfortunate being to industry and repentance." To show also how much this friend engrossed the secret thoughts of his heart, even in his dying moments, after quitting the tenement to drown himself, he first stepped into the ground floor of another tenement, and wrote the following lines : " O Lord, how weary I am of life ! If my acquaintance should happen to see this writing, he will remember perhaps the hand of an *old former acquaintance*."

"Despair pervades my soul—to death I fly for relief."

Here then is the testimony that this unfortunate person has fallen a victim to disappointed friendship and despair. The sweetest and most engaging pleasures of life are those which spring from our social connections; and let those who are joined in the bonds of particular friendship, be solicitous not to break off so delightful an union. A true friend is one of the most valuable blessings this life can bestow; and what greater satisfaction can we experience than that which arises from our being connected with one to whom we can safely disclose the most secret thoughts of our hearts. Yielding then to the benign propensity of returning a generous and a good action, and bestowing a small bounty on an old friend in distress, might have been the means (in the present case) of saving a soul from death; whereas, on the other hand, if the base and unfriendly conduct of persons whom we have once loved, dissolve all the bonds of amity and friendship, and show our confidence have been abused, then are opened some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart. If the unsuspecting friend be deserted in the hour of distress by the friend in whom he trusted; or in the midst of his misfortunes meets with cold indifference, where he expected to find the kindest sympathy, and where the heart is sickened and wounded by the ingratitude or faithlessness of one on whom it had leaned the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief?

I hope Mr. Editor, there is not to be found an advocate for suicide. A heart impressed with a religious fear will say, "how can I commit this great evil, and sin against God?" The Christian religion teaches us to support ourselves with fortitude under all our misfortunes and trials. From hardships and difficulties we derive an experience and steadiness, which teach us to act with propriety in the stations wherein Providence has placed us. It is our duty to acquiesce in what is allotted us; and our sole concern to acquit ourselves well in our respective stations, and sustain well our characters upon this stage of life. Every one therefore ought to be satisfied with his portion, and instead

of repining at the more liberal allotments of his neighbour, should be grateful for his own ; for the wisdom of the supreme Ruler of the world alone knows what is most conducive to the well-being of the general system, and to the particular welfare of individuals. He assigns our stations, and it is our duty to conform to it.

I remain, Mr. Editor,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

JOSEPH JAMES.

*Stoke Bishop, near Bristol,
Nov. 22, 1797.*

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